# Misplaced States and the Politics of Regional Identity: Towards a Theoretical Framework

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**Abstract:**

Whilst there is no shortage of analyses on the politics of regions in International Relations, little attention has been paid to states who perceive that they do not properly fit in the regions they happen to be located in. These are the 'misplaced states': they stand out not so much because of material capacities but because they espouse an identity, manifested in different ways, in marked contrast to the states around them. This article asks what causes this process of a change in identity amongst misplaced states in different parts of the world. Comparing across regions, it analyses why and how states reconstruct their identities in order to enhance or deemphasise their degrees of regional conformity. By focusing on the 'role-location process' rooted in role theory, this article contributes to the literature by conceptualising the phenomenon of 'misplacement.' A state is misplaced when there is mismatch between its aspirations and others' expectations for it. The article also details how and why misplacement occurs and studies its implications both for the states in question as well as for the politics of their geographical regions.

**Keywords:** *misplacement; role; identity; region; role location process*

**Introduction**

About ten years ago, when a visiting German professor teaching African politics at a South African university asked his class whether anyone would be interested in studying in Gaborone, Maputo or Dar-es-Salaam, his suggestion was met with a stony silence. That silence did not reveal displeasure or disagreement. Instead, the very idea that South African students would study elsewhere in the region had simply never occurred to them, as the subsequent class discussion revealed. Whilst one could easily dismiss these as simply revealing the South African elite's 'semi-peripheral' orientation toward the 'metropole', we assert that there is much more complexity to these cognitive processes.

Most states have a sense of belonging to a specific region and location. The phenomenon is not only material or geographic but also relational as the process of constructing a national identity in a specific territory goes hand-in-hand with a process of identification with and differentiation from neighbouring states. These processes of 'identification' and 'differentiation' expressed in role relationships shape states' meta-narratives regarding being part of a region and distancing from others. In each case, these relational processes also involve expectations of other states that may make a certain state feel part of a region or alien from it.

In these regional dynamics, we commonly observe that certain states appear to be misfit within a regional location. There might be two underlying rationales for this. First, it may occur because a state feels that it belongs in a different part of the world cognitively speaking. Second, other states in a region may emit certain signals to the said state to treat it like an 'alien' state. Whilst there is no shortage of analyses on the politics of regions in International Relations, very little attention has been paid to states which perceive that they do not properly fit in the region they happen to be located in. These states 'stand out' not so much because of material capacities, but because they espouse an identity – manifested in different forms – in marked contrast to the states around them. For example, both Australia and South Africa have sought in different ways to reconstruct their identities towards being more 'Asian' or 'African' states respectively. Similarly, the Pakistani state has tended to distance itself from its ancient Indian heritage while attempting to associate itself more with an Arab identity.

The primary question that this project will aim to answer is: what causes this process of a change in identity amongst states in different regions of the world? Comparing across regions, this research analyses why and how states reconstruct their identities in order to enhance or de-emphasise their degree of regional conformity. By examining a series of diverse cases that cut across the conventional developed/developing-state divide, this project conceptualises the phenomenon of 'misplacement', including how and why it occurs and its implications. We aim to develop the notion of 'misplacement' into an analytical tool of enquiry in order to show why these states' governments and/or their societies feel less 'connected' to their geographical regions. Furthermore, we also examine why certain states seek greater or lesser regional assimilation and aspiration.

Though we commonly observe the dynamics of misplacements operating in several regions involving certain states, we do not have sufficient theoretical tools at our disposal to help us understand the key attributes of misplaced states. We do not know what strategies they adopt to deal with the persistent feeling of misplacement and what the implications of their efforts are. We also know very little about how these processes of misplaced identities are conceived and articulated by foreign policy decision-makers within certain states. Furthermore, there exists limited knowledge of how certain neighbours express their views about misplaced states. That may include certain types of foreign policy reactions from regional neighbours which may enhance or decrease misplaced states' sense of alienation from their geographical region. Overall, there is a serious dearth of knowledge around the processes through which states tend to become alienated from the regions in which they happen to be located. This research analyses why and how states reconstruct their identities in order to enhance or de-emphasise their degrees of regional conformity. Developing the notion of 'misplacement' into an analytical tool, this special issue engages with the ideas of role theory to chart the cases of six countries on a continuum, studying the examples ranging from well-placed states at one end of the spectrum to extremely misplaced states at the other end.

This conceptual note is structured in the following way: the next section situates the current project in the broader literature on regional identity. It shows that there are clear puzzles emanating from real-life behaviour by certain states which highlight the need of academic conceptualisation. However, the

contemporary literature does not address that need. That section makes the case for studying the phenomenon of misplacement that has not been given enough attention so far.

The third section presents a definition of what we mean by a 'misplaced state' and outlines some of its key attributes. We argue that there can be many types of misplacement – ranging from soft to hard misplacement. The third section also identifies how the phenomenon of misplacement can be mapped through a variety of tools. That section ends by looking at some of the common, real-life consequences of a state's misplacement including loss of legitimacy, a reduction of the variety of roles available at their disposal and a disjuncture between their elites and the societies.

The fourth section puts forward a theoretical model based on role theory for the study of misplaced states. That section helps us understand how the processes of role performance may intensify a state's dissociation from its geographic region. We start that section by outlining the 'layered model' put forth by Hagstrom & Gustafsson (2015). We then move on to further clarify the relation between roles and identities. We argue that the ideas of role theory are better placed to help build a theoretical framework of foreign policy behaviour of misplaced statehood as opposed to the ideas of ontological (in)security and 'liminality.' The fifth section summarises the discussion and highlights avenues for future research on the subject. In that section, we also present a brief introduction of the remaining articles of the special issue.

**Regional Identity and State Misplacement**

Like any other endeavour for conceptual development, we should first address the puzzle. One might ask: what is at stake that needs addressing through a new concept of 'misplaced states'? We believe that the need to develop this concept emanates from real-life state behaviour which shows a state's alienation from its geographical regions. We notice that a such alienation from its region does not have simple, benign results – it often leads to conflicts and hinders cooperation.

The empirical examples of the phenomenon of 'misplacedness' (and its negative repercussions) are visible in almost every region of the world. For example, the case of Pakistan shows that its self-inflicted isolation in the South Asian region has exacerbated conflict with the neighbouring India and

has hindered regional cooperation multiple times. It perceives itself to be a part of the Islamic Middle East than an India-dominated South Asia. Pakistan's misplacedness appears at its starkest when we see it as the only country in South Asia that portrays its competition with India in Islamist terms: it likes to see itself as a state engaged in a perpetual jihad against an 'infidel' and 'imperialist' India (Kapur 2017). Pakistan conceives itself as the only state challenging Hindu India's domination despite the fact that there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan. Other South Asian states (such as Sri Lanka, Maldives and Bangladesh) also have sizable Muslim populations. The fact that Pakistan does not acknowledge the presence of such a large number of Indian Muslims (and it does not associate with them) speaks volumes about how it really sees itself as an outsider in South Asia. It thinks of itself as a country comprising of a *different* type of Muslims.

Pakistan's misplacedness has also hindered cooperation in several regional forums. Importantly, it is not unusual to see Pakistan being completely isolated in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). For example, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Uri, India in October 2016 which were widely believed to be perpetrated by Pakistani-supported terrorists, other SAARC members boycotted the SAARC summit meeting that was scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November that year. Pakistan has also boycotted the recent meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Countries in March 2019 over its invitation to India to attend the event.

Other examples of being misplaced include Japan's keenness before WWII to associate more with the club of the Western great powers (*rekkyo*) instead of associating with its region. It had limited diplomatic relations with the Asian states which were restored during the Cold War. We also witnessed in the case of apartheid South Africa that initially it sought to present itself as the bastion of 'Western civilisation' on the African continent with a strong societal association with Europe. It even tried (and failed) to become a part of NATO. The post-apartheid South Africa has made Africa the centre of its foreign policy and has actively sought to reconstruct its identity to 'be' African, by sponsoring numerous forms of regional institutional innovation (i.e hosting the pan-African parliament, rejuvenating the African Union), supporting peace-making and peacekeeping initiatives, and acting as the spokesperson for the African continent at global fora such as the G20 or BRICS. However, we

witness the prevalence of societal distancing from the continent in the form of anti-immigrant narratives connected to crime and drug trafficking.

Where the feeling of being misplaced brings forward conflictual behaviour, the feeling of being well-placed tends to induce cooperation through the use of a state's common regional identity. For example, we see in the case of Brazil that its attempts to promote regional integration is usually based on its credentials of a Latin-American state and a developing country surrounded by like-minded states. That shows that in contrast to a misplaced state, a well-placed state uses its commonality with the neighbourhood strategically, but also normatively since it bases its actions and discourses more in the common ideational traits shared with others than in the possible obstacles that regional integrations schemes might entails.

The examples have highlighted the presence of a real-life phenomenon of misplacement in need of academic conceptualisation. Whilst the past ten years have seen an incredible proliferation of literature on regional identity, most of it has been about the construction of a regional identity with the overriding emphasis on conformity within the region, through institutions, norms or the convergence of markets.[1] Although the current project is also about regional identity, it is of a very specific phenomenon which requires some contextualisation. Keating (1998: 86) argues that regional identity and its relation to political action is shaped by three important elements. The first involves 'cognitive' awareness: 'people must simply be aware of a region and its limits in order to distinguish it from other regions'. The second is 'affective': 'how people feel about the region and the degree to which it provides a framework for common identity, possibly in combination with class or national identities'. Finally, an 'instrumental' orientation which involves the extent to which a region is used as a basis for mobilisation and collective action to pursue social, economic and political goals. The missing link, however, remains the personal and collective dimensions of identity on the one hand and the histories of a region and the personal histories of individuals, which rarely conflate.

[1] The concept of 'region' is often contested but we employ the term to denote the cognitive and geographical space that a country physically belongs to. The concept of regions is often socially constructed through factors such as physical proximity, cultural affinity, shared social values, and a sphere of influence produced by a certain power (see Wehner 2015; Koga 2017, 15).

In order to help overcome some of these analytical challenges, Paasi (2002:139-140) suggests thinking about the institutionalisation of regions to link it with identity. He contends that the dynamics of institutionalisation involve four simultaneous processes. The first process relates to a region's territorial shape – the boundaries that emerge through various social practices that 'distinguish the region and identity discourses from those of other regions' (Paasi 2002: 140). The second process involves the symbolic shape, which emerges through practices including the economy, culture, media and governance whereby the narratives of identity are constructed. These include the name of the region and other symbols. The third process relates to the institutions that are required for the maintenance of the territorial and symbolic shapes. Such institutions produce 'us' v. 'them' narratives and could also be located outside the region. The final process relates to both an internal and externally established identity through social practices and consciousness, whereby social groups and movements could be mobilised. It is this very process about regional consciousness which comes closest to what this project explores (hence the relevance of this paper's opening vignette) but it does not fully conceptualise the phenomenon of misplaced state – the task performed by this project.

This project's main objective is to come up with a set of criteria that help us define a misplaced state, study the causes of misplacement and equip us with the tools to study the repercussions of a state believing itself to be misplaced. The next section will articulate the concept, showcase the types of misplacement and highlight some of the consequences of a state believing to be misplaced in the region.

*Misplaced states: Articulating the concept*

We conceptualise a misplaced state as a state that experiences a degree of (cognitive) dissonance between its geographic location and its cognitive sense of place. This dissonance manifests in a mismatch between a state's national aspirations and the way other states recognise it. The incongruity between the Self and Others' perceptions within a region is revealed through certain roles that self and others play or attempt to enact. While a state may be misplaced because of national identity forces, the external force of Others' actions (external identity dimension) is key to understanding the misplacedness of a state in a region.

To further elaborate the concept, we contend that misplacement is not an end goal in and of itself nor is it a conscious, purposefully crafted desired state of affairs. Rather misplacement refers to the *reactions* of State A upon discovering that States B, C and D (within the region) consider it undesirable. Misplaced states seek to mitigate these reactions from (regional) Others and employ various strategies to do so. Ontologically the state of being misplaced comes into being once State A conceives of, or introduces various strategies to ameliorate Others' sense of distance towards it. Mitigating misplacement is always an ongoing process, since State A's tactics and strategies are not always likely to succeed and often involve or reveal contradictions and tensions.

This dissonance also leads to cognitive dissociation which can manifest in real, institutional terms. This process is role based and involves the national role conception of the self and the role expectations of others. Yet these roles may or may not be accepted by others. Thus it is in the process of role location where we have the possibility to observe and comprehend the relational manifestations of a misplaced state with regard to its regional position. In other words, we believe that misplacement is a 'real phenomenon' that exists and can be substantiated through discourse analysis or narrative construction.[2]

A key feature of a misplaced state is a mismatch between self and other's perceptions within a region that takes form through an interaction of role and counter-role. Misplaced states are often at the centre of the processes of role differentiation initiated from within or outside these states. For misplaced states, role conceptions[3] entail conscious strategies and narratives designed by policy entrepreneurs that promote cognitive dissonance between a country's geographic location and its cognitive sense of self in that cultural space. While misplaced states can conceive roles that do not fit well within the existing regional social order, other actors from that regional social order also tend to reject the role conception of the self altogether.

Though the move towards gaining a different identity is a journey to something 'different' or 'new,' misplaced states can also treat the journey as destination itself. It is entirely possible that misplaced

[2] We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this point.
[3] We understand 'role conceptions' as the ego's self-definition and the alter's expectations regarding the role of the self (Harnisch 2011: 8)

states internalise "misplacedness" and their dissatisfaction no longer motivates them to immediately mitigate such ideational discrepancies. If so, they find stability in misplacement and some kind of peace in transition. They do not have to be at peace with themselves only if and when they achieve their objective of having everyone accept (and grant legitimacy to) their cognitive aspiration to belong elsewhere. The process itself is seen as journey as well as destination. The never-ending struggle may even end up becoming a permanent part of the identities of misplaced states.

Misplaced states exhibit certain characteristics that are reactions post hoc (often observed through their discourses) than 'natural' features of misplaced states. At the empirical level, misplaced states can be expected to act according to one or more of the following ways to ameliorate their position. First, state elites may seek to connect to an alternative other. Such actions may include the creation of a new regional organisation, seek to re-define what constitutes the region or engage in initiatives across a variety of issue-areas to signal their growing self-identification with another region. Pakistan is an interesting example of a case where it has repeatedly sought to connect with the states in the Arabian Gulf, depicting itself as a Middle Eastern country. That has meant overplaying its Islamic identity which is the primary feature in common between Pakistan and the Gulf states. It is no surprise that Pakistan has championed the causes of Muslims in distant lands such as Bosnia in the Yugoslav Wars. Japan also redefined the boundaries of 'Asia' to emphasise Japan's role in it through the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in the 1930s.

Second, misplaced states might seek a closer alliance with a great power in the expectation that its closer relationship with the major power would compensate for its purported regional distance. One example would be post-apartheid South Africa's move to further much stronger links with China, especially since 2009, through its incorporation into the BRICS. Considering that it is the smallest of the BRIC economies, it justified its status elevation on the basis that it could speak for Africa, both within BRICS as well as the G20.

Third, misplaced state may seek to ameliorate how others project it as different, by providing regional or cultural public goods, thus 'buying off' neighbour's dissent. The provision of development assistance, facilitating transport or energy infrastructure either on the basis of monetary sponsorship or

technical support, emerge as examples. Israel's promotion of itself as a gay-friendly destination for tourists is an example of cultivating a positive image in the minds of the residents of the neighbouring states in the region. Fourth, rather than deny or downplay others' consideration of it as 'different', misplaced states actually concede the point and construct a narrative which highlights the perceived misplaced state's exceptionalism (most likely related to its history).

Fifth, some misplaced states may draw upon a traumatic past to justify role conceptions that emphasise their distinctiveness from other states in their geographical regions. This trauma might relate to their birth, loss of a section of their territory, defeat in war or any other aspect of their existential history. The memory of the trauma for Pakistan and Israel constantly shapes their relations with their neighbours and also colours their aspiration to belong to a region different from their geographical location. Likewise, the collective memory of the trauma regarding Japan vis-à-vis China and Korea continuously affects its relationships and role location processes with its neighbours in the region. A traumatic past is also deployed by misplaced states to blame their neighbours for wishing them ill. The neighbours are perceived to have agendas to conspire against these misplaced states. Past traumas are often seen as instructive in convincing misplaced states to avoid their repeat in the future at the hand of the neighbouring states.

Sixth, at times misplaced states tend to use their misplacement strategically to achieve certain economic or political gains. However, the adoption of a specific role to be accepted somewhere else can fail because external others to a region expect something different. Chile failed in locating a role of being an Asia Pacific state to join APEC in its first attempt because the significant others did not recognise Chile as such. This case shows that misplacement can be used to maximise benefits for the state through branding certain traces of an existing national identity or competing national ones. It also shows that although the phenomenon of misplacedness is relational (as a state has referential actors against whom it compares its degree of being misfit in a region), in most occasions it is self-driven. The self-side initiates the phenomenon and uses it as a policy option.

Whilst reducing the consequences of both hard and soft misplacement is a constant struggle, these effects can be mitigated by the extent to which a misplaced state is both able to compensate for

its reduced influence and find new role locations outside its region, which is acknowledged by others as such. When misplacement is pursued as a conscious policy strategy by states for instrumental purposes, the effectiveness of such an approach can be assessed on the basis of strategic success or failure. Libya's attempts (under Gaddafi) to recast itself - by choice - as more Arab than African and consolidate its Arab identity - provides a rare example of a failed attempt at changing identity (towards the Arab world) that nevertheless allowed Gaddafi to 'return' to Africa and recast Libya as an African state with relatively little resistance to pursue a strong leadership role. The strategies adopted by states to deal with misplacement are not always reflective of their cognizance of the consequences of their actions. In other words, there is a need to separate strategy from consequences. Most of the consequences are related to the responses of the 'other' to one's actions. On the other hand, a failure of the strategy to deal with one's misplacement can harden misplacement.

*Types of misplacement*

Since unacknowledged recognition claims differ in terms of intensity due to historical significance (e.g. colonial legacy), past conflicts or trauma, we distinguish between three sub-groups located on a continuum of placement and misplacement. That means that among misplaced states, the degree of "misplacedness" differs. At one end of a spectrum we witness the case of 'well-placed' states while on the other end, we have the cases of 'hard-misplacement' or extremely misplaced states. The cases of 'soft misplacement' occupy a spot at the middle of the continuum.

We assert that well-placed states do not face serious domestic or international contestations about the relationship between their geographical and cognitive positions in the world like misplaced states do. In such states, cognitive aspirations of the citizens to belong somewhere are the strongest regarding their geographical locations. Well-placed states are usually considered by everyone to be very well integrated into their regions and sometimes perform the role of leadership of their regions (e.g. Germany in Continental Europe or India in South Asia). It is important to note that their status as well-placed states is also acknowledged by their regional neighbours, imparting them with a sense of cognitive certainty. Overall, well-placed states have a psychological sense of firmly belonging in a region. We identify Brazil as a well-placed state in this special issue.

Further along the pendulum, we find soft (or moderate) cases of misplacement. In such situations, states feel somewhat misplaced but that element does not persist in the long-term or manifest much in their behaviour in the international realm. Lesser degrees of misplacement are primarily characterised merely by a cognitive aspiration with little or no institutionalised distancing from the region. For example, whilst post-apartheid South Africa is not only entirely regionally integrated in diplomatic, economic and security terms, it often takes the lead in those processes. However, in some societal dimensions, many South Africans (regardless of race) display an emotional aspiration towards the United States and Europe that is incongruent with the foreign policy espoused by government elites (Van der Westhuizen & Smith 2015). Yet, it is precisely the disjuncture between the official, high-level priority given to Africa against the prevalence of societal distancing from the continent in the form of anti-immigrant narratives connected to crime and drug trafficking that makes post-apartheid South Africa an example of soft misplacement, with little to no institutional distancing. Chile is a similar case, since Chileans tend to see themselves more as part of the West than part of Latin America. The regional aspirations of leadership are usually met with scepticism by internal elites, who prefer a country submerged in European values rather than be seen as Latin American. Similar to South Africa in recent times, this mild sense of misplacement in Chile is an elite-driven aspiration for development and higher standard of living idealistically observed in the West. Occasionally, Chile lays emphasis on the idea of South America and locates itself within that region. That strategy helps it to cope with its mild misplacement. The later Meiji period Japan in the late 19$^{th}$ century is another example of soft misplacement as it aspired to global status through *rekkyo-iri* (assuming the status of great power) because it did not consider the region to be independent or self-governed due to colonisation.

Towards the end of the spectrum and in juxtaposition to well-placed states, we have the cases of hard misplacement. Such states consistently express their dissatisfaction over their regional setting in the long-run and act in order to detach themselves from the region to which they psychologically and physically belong. Misplacement resulting from historic domestic conflicts relating to religion, race, or ethnicity tend to be instances of 'hard' misplacement as the cases of apartheid South Africa, Israel and

Pakistan suggest. In these states, misplacement does not primarily reflect through mere manifestations of cognitive aspiration but can also affect interstate relations at a deeper, fundamental level to the extent that regressive regional relations become institutionalised through diplomatic and even military security practices. Equally, hard cases of misplacement at both regional and global levels (such as apartheid South Africa, Israel) would constitute extreme but rare cases in which cognitive dissociation from the geographic region is complete.

Cases of hard misplacement tend to reflect institutionalised reactions by the misplaced state, such as its military and other agreements with states and great powers beyond the immediate region (examples include Pakistan's military cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states; Israel's defence alliance with the Western states). In cases of soft misplacement such reactions manifest in non-institutionalised settings or more frequently at a societal level (for example, the prevalence of xenophobic attacks against foreign Africans in the South African case).

A state denoting the case of hard (or 'extreme') misplacement differs from a 'rogue' or a 'pariah' state as the former finds a cognitive home somewhere else in the world while the latter finds it hard to be accepted *anywhere* in the world. Where a misplaced state is misplaced by choice, the status of a pariah state takes the form of punishment – others turn a state into a pariah state. Whereas a misplaced state might have a choice regarding where it belongs, a pariah state does not have many choices. In the case of Pakistan (an example of hard misplacement), it can exercise the choice to revert back to its South Asian neighbours who are likely to accept it as one of their own. However, a pariah state may not have that choice. A misplaced state might seek (and gain) legitimacy outside its region, a pariah state cannot get legitimacy outside its geographical home.

*Mapping misplacement*

Despite the obvious 'fuzziness' of the term, the aspiration of a misplaced state can be mapped on a systematic, empirical basis. Doing so is necessary to understand who leads the phenomenon of misplacement. In order to operationalise the concept, it is necessary to first understand what types of the elite-society relationship that each state has. If a state is a more elite-driven polity, such as one-party democracy, a semi-authoritarian autocracy or a dictatorship, the method of the content analysis of official statements toward outside/inside the state will be useful to examine the state's aspirations in the region. That is because such a regime tends not to incorporate voices and opinions from its society, and

a decision-making process is largely dominated by government elites alone. For example, Japan's decision-making system during the inter-War period was very much dominated by the government elites, particularly the Ministry of Army and the Ministry of Navy, and their views on Japan in Asia (and the world) had the greatest impact on shaping its foreign policy. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the elite's policy and the status in a region that they aspire for.

Conversely, if a state is more inclusive and the influence of its society is relatively strong in this state's decision-making process, such as in a democracy, investigating the social views and social interaction with the government will be important. One of the most useful ways, but certainly not the only way, of mapping the emotional aspiration of a misplaced state is a public opinion survey. For example, when South African respondents were asked in which other region they would choose to live, Africa only appeared after the USA, Europe, China and South America (van der Westhuizen & Smith 2015). A degree of regional 'distancing' is quite apparent in the public opinion surveys conducted in misplaced states and it increases with lower levels of education (Almeida, Carneiro, Onuki & Guimaraes 2015). Other, more qualitative means of mapping a society's emotional aspiration include analysing: What narrative and concepts has the governments used to identify t country? How much and what type of priority do languages of the region enjoy within the misplaced state? To what extent does intra-regional student exchanges feature over those outside the region? How important is an understanding of the history of the region in high school history textbooks? Similarly, in university social science curricula, how prominently does the region feature over, say a focus on an extra-regional role model states (such as the United States or Europe in case of South Africa)?

*Consequences of misplacement*

The cognitive aspiration to belong elsewhere has significant consequences for a state's international relations. First, a common consequence of a state feeling misplaced leads to its lack or loss of legitimacy from the other states in the region where it is located. This may also culminate in a lack of esteem on the part of a misplaced state.

Second, a consequence of misplacement is that the variety of roles available to an actor is reduced. The most obvious example would be thwarted leadership aspirations, with the degree of

misplacement related to the extent of leadership initiatives frustrated by others either in an 'active' or 'passive' mode. In hard cases, active attempts could include various measures to counterbalance the misplaced state (including military means), whereas in more soft cases, the loss of leadership manifests in a misplaced state's reduced soft power ambitions. Whilst misplaced states may remain key regional players in functional issue-areas, they may find their diplomatic and political ambit much more constrained. Israel is an example of a state that has occasionally attempted to exercise regional leadership roles, and repeatedly been thwarted in its attempts. On the other hand, Japan in the pre-World War II period played a leading political role in Asia for a decade or so before it was rejected by external states. Pakistan also occasionally competes with India to get the recognition of a leadership role in the Indian subcontinent. However, in most cases, other significant states in the region (Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal) side with India. That further exacerbates Pakistan's isolation in the region, making it look towards the Arabian Peninsula as its new cognitive home.

Third, misplaced states can also suffer from severe societal/elite disjuncture. Such disconnect is a feature of many states but in the case of misplaced states, there can be situations in which states' elites might push to cognitively associate with a different region while its ordinary citizens might not be inclined that way. It can also work in reverse, in which case the process might be led by the societies of misplaced states. In such situations, the elites might be forced to participate in the project without much desire. For example, the Arabisation process that Pakistan went through in the 1980s was very much state-led at the time when the country was under a military dictatorship. However, the contemporary dynamics of that process are more society-driven. A push by both sides may be more comprehensive but a disjuncture may still exist in such a situation due to the disagreement over strategies to be adopted to accomplish that aim.

Like much of the Constructivist literature we develop the concept of misplacement as a specific type or form of state identity that has not yet been captured by previous analyses. Working from the assumption that all states want to belong, misplacement seeks to reveal that some states seek to ameliorate their perceived sense of distance from their region as an ontological yearning – a task that is performed

here through the use of role theory. However, to do so we draw on Hagstrom & Gustafsson's 'layered model of identity change.'

**A theoretical model of roles for the study of misplaced states**

We will begin developing our analytical framework by looking at Hagstrom & Gustafsson's (2015) 'layered model.' To capture change and continuity, identity should be considered as layered 'and simultaneously constituted on mutually interacting levels of intersubjective meaning making' (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 6). Hagstrom & Gustafsson (2015: 6) assert that 'identity change in the less institutionalised layers interact and builds upon layers that are more institutionalised'. These latter layers are more "'solidly sedimented and more difficult for actors to politicise and change'" (Wæver 2002: 31 quoted in Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 6). Stated differently, 'more sedimented layers of identity construction can enable different identity constructs in less sedimented layers and even sharp turns in identity construction, but changes in the latter can also affect the former' (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 6).

Three layers might be conceived in that regard: the most sedimented, fundamental layer is least subject to change (and is most institutionalised). At the middle layer, we find multiple identities that describe the Other and therefore also the Self. More exact distinctions and demarcations between Self and Other are negotiated, with some identities being more important in certain contexts and in relation to particular Others (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015:7). The issue of comparisons with others is at the centre of this discussion as that process promotes misplacement. Importantly, the process of comparison does not have to be associated with 'negative and dichotomised imagination of difference' – it can also include positive comparison and integration (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 7). Moreover, it is important to recognise that 'all of a state's identities need not be constructed in relation to external Others', whilst some identities could be constructed as part of a collective identity with other states (of particular interest for our project) (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 7).

The final and, the least institutionalised layer, 'is where policies and specific political issues are discussed and where agents operate' (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 7). For example, 'the way in which

bilateral problems are discussed and understood' has implications for identity constructions in other layers, especially the middle layer (Hagstrom & Gustafsson 2015: 7). The top, least institutionalised layer, is where 'identity entrepreneurs' – not unlike norm or role entrepreneurs – promote their desired versions of a particular identity, by calling attention to, or even creating 'issues by "using language that names, interprets and dramatizes them"' (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 897 quoted in Hagstrom & Gustafsson, 2015: 7).

The inability to resolve the discrepancy between their geographic and cognitive regions leads misplaced states to demonstrate aspirations (be they strategic or existential) to 'belong' elsewhere. Unlike most studies of regional identity, our focus is directed toward states that participate in the functional relations within their regions, yet their attention is sometimes or frequently directed elsewhere. Thinking of ourselves as part of an Other outside one's own geographic region provides a degree of ontological security and reinforces the state's aspiration to belong elsewhere. Such cognitive aspirations are at the centre of this attempt to make a state distance itself from a certain region and perceive to be cognitively located in a different one. As Hagstrom & Gustafsson (2015: 10; emphasis in original) assert:

> Identity is thus constructed through the forging of an emotional allegiance that makes us feel like we belong…[C]ollective identity is a matter of identification on the part of the participating individuals. It does not exist 'in itself', but only ever to the extent that specific individuals subscribe to it. It is as strong – or as weak – as it is alive in the thoughts and actions of the group members, and able to motivate their thoughts and actions. When one identifies with a particular notion, one *feels* part of a certain collective. It follows that without emotional attachment, identities are difficult to construct. In such a situation, identity entrepreneurs appear more seldom and are much less likely to succeed.

The political elites of misplaced states (who can also be characterised as its identity entrepreneurs) are perpetually concerned with trying to resolve the misplacement by demonstrating how a misplaced state actually does fit in the region or by reconceptualising its role identities so that it

may be more properly considered part of another region. When there is dissonance between the Self's actions and their self-identity or failure by the Other(s) to recognise such actions, the cognitive dissonance can involve feelings of shame or insult that drive identity change. The cognitive aspiration to belong somewhere else may be found at the societal level or at the level of a state's elites.

*Identity and roles*

We argue that analysing role-based relationships between ego and alter informs us about this process of misplaced identities. To be sure, similar concepts provided by constructivists examine cognitive mismatch that occurs within a state, particularly through the concept of 'ontological security,' which refers to 'a sense of stable identity and continuity in one's place in the world' (Giddens 1984). Theoretical debates over ontological security have been significantly developed recently. Mitzen (2006) argued that if the routinised (negative) security relationship between a state and a significant other(s) is changing, such as in the case of security dilemma, the state would likely resist improving the relationship, as its security identity rests more on the routinised negative relationship. In addition to the importance of inter-state relations, Steele (2008) advanced a theoretical framework by examining the role of domestic self-narrative, arguing that the stability of actor's identity can be disrupted by not only external factors, but also domestic debates. Building on these arguments, scholars currently examine the ontological tensions existing between internal and external factors and the causes and processes of sustaining and disrupting actors' ontological security (Koga and Nordin 2019). For instance, Zarakol (2010) examines Japanese and Turkish reluctance to apologize for their historical crimes despite the existence of international political pressures and Zarakol argues that apologies would likely distort their state identity and thus prevent them from doing so. The corollary of this is that if the international community regards their inaction unjustifiable, the mismatch between actor's ontological security and international opinions would create 'misplacedness' in the international realm. The concept thus contributes to clarifying one type of misplaced state.

New research on Ontological Security has started to study the reasons and processes of why states may never feel totally secure; a phenomenon called Ontological Insecurity (see Browning and Joenniemi 2017; Steele 2017; Kinnvall 2004). States are in a constant quest to achieve such as security

and in this quest, they would bring in new type of narrations to achieve a sense of regional belonging or to simply go extra regionally. The analytical value of the Ontological security literature (including the focus on Ontological Insecurity) notwithstanding, it cannot give a thorough account for the key drivers that make states to be regionally misplaced. Ontological security literature certainly helps to uncover part of the process of regional misplacedness, but it cannot provide a specific account of the type of actions states will take that amplify and sometimes tend to ameliorate their sense of regional misplacedness. Instead, role theory is better equipped to provide descriptive and conceptual explanations on the different courses of actions that a state and its political elite are likely and willing to take to cope with the ontological insecurity that the feeling of not being part of a region triggers in the state. Symbolic interactionist role theory has a micro dimension that links an actor's actions to its identity and help us unveil the different role-based actions an actor could take to cope with its sense of being a misplaced regional state.

Recently, Klose (2019) has opened a new path of research on the interplay of ontological security theory and role theory. He calls for a dialogue between the two approaches. Klose argues that role theory can account for process of how the self-image of ego disconnects with its own societal roles that are negotiated in the role-location process between ego and alter. This crisis of disconnection between the self-image and its societal roles can create an identity crisis of a high magnitude that brings the self to question its own sense of being. At the same time, Klose argues that roles can help provide a context in which such crisis unfolds (and how it unfolds) as well as how ego can create a new script or role to achieve a new sense of being ontologically secure. Ego can create new roles to achieve such a sense of being and feel ontologically secure again after a crisis of identity meaning. Ego has reflective intelligence or the ability to create new scripts by relying on role-making, role-taking and alter casting mechanisms and in this way stabilise itself in social environment. While Klose (2019) gives agency to ontological security by bringing in role theory assumptions and its descriptive and explanatory power, he shows that all actions of an actor are role based. Thus, while showing their complementarity, he shows how roles triumph over ontological security accounts. This is relevant for our theorisation of misplacedness and for our choice to opt for a role-based approach. As seen in the case studies of this

special issue, not all types and varieties of misplacedness are driven by a severe crisis of identity and thus ontological security concerns. Even when ontological security (or insecurity) is the driver behind all manifestations of misplacedness, Klose (2019) shows that the study of its external manifestations is not related to internal identity but role-based actions in a process of role-counterrole. In this special issue, we are interested in concrete role actions actors take that create, amplify and reduce the misplacedness phenomenon of ego.

More recently, the concept of 'liminality' is introduced in ontological security literature, which has the potential to develop the concept of misplaced state itself. Liminality generally refers to 'ambiguity and indeterminacy' that 'elude or slip through the network of classifications' (Rumelili 2012: 495). It identifies actors that are situated in between classifications, such as Western/non-Western and democratic/undemocratic. In ontological security theories, liminality is located within the concept of ontological insecurity, which refers to an existence of 'anxieties and dangers' about actor's 'identity and autonomy' (Laing 1960, 39, 41; Kinnvall 2019, 285). With this concept, Malksoo (2019) argues that liminal actors are essentially insecure about their identities, and thus, they are 'by definition ontologically upsetting for guardians of the existing order' (366). If misplaced states are 'liminal actors,' then they would likely be disrupters in an international order. In this sense, the concept of ontological security and liminality would provide some analytical frameworks to understand the formulation and persistence of misplaced states.

That said, the existing understanding provided by ontological (in)security and liminality is *still* unsatisfactory in explaining foreign policy patterns of misplaced states for the following reasons. First, ontological (in)security discussion would not be necessarily relevant in explaining the types of foreign policy behaviour that misplaced states would likely take. This is because while being diverse (Steele 2019, 324-235), ontological security theories are generally less focused on explaining the pattern of ontologically (in)secure states' foreign policy. Instead, they are more interested in a broader question—'the importance of identity and memory for the production of security, focusing on the way identity and memory are produced and reproduced at the state level, for nation or society' (Innes 2017, 381). Even if the literature touches upon state's foreign policy decisions, the current theories tend to analyse

the internal factors of agents (e.g. domestic narratives that are affected by ontological (in)security) rather than its external factors (e.g. state's strategy to manage its relations with their significant others). In other words, their research programmes ask different questions.

Second, the concept of liminality, which has the potential to explain the foreign policy patterns of misplaced state, is still under-theorised. There are at least four issues with that pertaining to definition and conceptualisation. Firstly, scholarly consensus over the definition of liminality in IR has yet to be reached. It is unclear whether the concept focuses the static status of actor's identities, such as 'betwixt and between,' or their dynamic status, such as transition to a particular categorisation (e.g. Rumelili 2012: 495; Malksoo 2012: 483; Joenniemi 2014: 82). Secondly, liminality conceptually resonates with ontological insecurity, yet the concept of misplaced states does not necessarily match with those two. Given that some misplaced states are not necessarily ontologically insecure, by definition, misplacedness is not tantamount to liminality or ontological insecurity. Thirdly, the nature of liminal actors' roles and behaviour has yet to be systematically analysed. While liminal actors can be disrupters in the exiting social structure, they are not always 'upsetting' for the structure because it is entirely possible that they can also achieve ontologically secure status as liminal actors. Fourthly, it has yet to be fully theorised how liminality produces a variance of actors' behaviour. In this sense, the applicability of the concept of liminality to the misplaced state is still obscure.

In other words, while ontological security and the concept of liminality are useful conceptual frameworks to understand characteristics and a particular behaviour of misplaced states, they still have difficulty in systematically answering some of our key questions: How are misplaced states created in a regional context? How diverse are those misplaced states in a certain region? What patterns of foreign policy behaviour would they have?

In this context, role theory is able to better respond to these questions. In fact, role theory contends that roles capture the most important aspects of state identity since identity as used by constructivists does not imply actions from the actor. Who you are does not involve predispositions to act (McCourt 2012; McCourt 2014; Wehner and Thies 2014)? The behaviour of an actor can be comprehended and also observed through a role lens. Actors while acting in a social context, or setting,

do not bring their full identities to that setting; they just show a role or set of them that is counteracted with a counterrole(s) by the other or set of others. Wehner and Thies (2014) suggest that identity only implies behavioural consequences whiles role is used as a link between identity and action. Thus, roles act as a via media and link the *who I am* dimension of identity with a social context in which an actor is expected to show part of that *who I am* throughout a process of role-play. Nabers (2011) suggests that roles are the basis for identities and indicate behavioural predisposition of an actor. An actor's roles allow for the process of identification from the other to the self (Harnisch 2011). Identity is relational and not pre-social since it is sustained, redefined and reproduced in day to day practices and routines within an existing social context (cf. McCourt 2014: 10). If identity is reproduced through role-play between ego and alter, then roles can also be understood from alter's perspective as identity markers in foreign policy that tells significant others who that actor (ego) is (Thies and Wehner 2019). In this sense, the role-set of an actor – that is, the number of roles one possesses in one's social life (Aggestam 2006) – can be used as a proxy to capture the overall identity of that actor (Thies and Nieman 2017). Roles contain not only the national identity dimension of an actor but also the external one in which we can understand our identity in relation to others.

*Role location and role-counterrole interactions*

Any role needs a counterrole to form a role relationship and complete the social act (Stryker and Statham 1985). Sometimes these role location processes take place in a regional setting in an antagonistic way (e.g., Thies 2013). To understand how the process of misplacement occurs we need to briefly review some key concepts of role theory, such as role expectations, role location and significant and general others.

On some occasions, as expected for milder (or soft) cases of misplacement, the self-side of the role conception becomes strong vis-à-vis the expectations coming from significant others or the social cues of the regional or the international system. Yet this does not mean that role expectations from others are irrelevant or do not influence the role conception since the self must always consider who among its potential significant others will partner with it to form a meaningful role relationship. For instance, the self may be pursuing a role that is rejected regionally but accepted in other regions or in

multilateral settings. In other words, role expectations from significant others are important in the making of a role for the self. Thus, role expectations refer to those expectations that alter ascribes and expects ego to enact (Kirste and Maull 1996: 289). A significant other is a primary socializing agent for ego (Thies 2001; 2013). A general other is the social system from where one's own position and appropriated pattern of behaviour can be drawn by the self, placing itself in the shoes of the other (Wehner and Thies 2014). It is also important to note that the significant and general others are amenable to change and can be more like moving targets depending on international social situations. The cues emanating from the social system convey the intentions of the general other to the subject. This process of socialization guides the phenomenon of misplacement by attempting to reconcile self's role conceptions and role relationships with others that meet with general approval by the regional audience of states.

Sub-regional systems and international ones may show contradictory expectations with regards to the most appropriate roles, amplifying the sense of regional misplacedness. In addition, role location describes the process whereby a social actor locates a suitable role in a social structure (Thies 2012: 29). The role location process has been described by Walker (1987) as the heart of foreign policy making, and by Thies (2001; 2013) as a socialization process. Drawing on Thies (2013), this article makes the case for the role location process as unfolding in geographic and cultural spatial context. Roles are specific to such contexts. For instance, states' first role location processes involve seeking the sovereign state role (Thies 2013; Beasley and Kaarbo 2018). That process has both geopolitical and cultural dimensions that are implicated in seeking and performing the social act of locating a new role as a sovereign state in a particular region. Moreover, different roles that identify a state with a specific geographic and cultural space can be internally and externally contested, which fuel narratives of misplacement and eventually gain the upper hand among leaders and foreign policy makers. As roles are context specific, then other roles of a state may indicate a geographical belonging such as South American state or Asia Pacific state, or cultural belonging, such as Western state, despite existing contestation. Such roles can be self-conceived and achieved or externally attributed by significant

others. Both may experience severe domestic contestation which may result in the phenomenon of misplacement.

A state may attempt to achieve a role that it has conceived for itself, or it may attempt to enact a role that is ascribed to it by others. Importantly, significant other(s) must ratify the role by adopting the appropriate counterrole(s). The audience of states affected by this role location process may also weigh in with their views on the appropriateness of the role, on the resulting role relationships as well as on how they are enacted. Most often this occurs in a regional context. It is at this juncture that a state can feel the distance and/or the rejections from regional others to the role selected. States may choose to stop pursuing their preferred roles, or they may even try to force them on others. The effect of failing to locate and interact with others regionally may also be minimised by seeking global or extra-regional others as role relationship partners or by initiating a new role location process within the region to prevent excessive detachment.

We argue, therefore, that the main mechanism to trace misplacement is the 'role location process where any role conception has to be completed by a counterrole' (Thies 2013: 35). As mentioned before, a state's experience of misplacedness is expressed through conscious strategies and narratives designed by policy entrepreneurs that promote some degree of cognitive dissonances between a country's geographic location and its sense of physical or cultural place. In role theoretic terms, role location process, in which one part of the role-counterrole interaction has sense of misplacedness, starts with an Ego's conception that is fully or partially rejected by external role expectations. One feels that its cognitive and geographical neighbours do not agree with its own role conception. Since the term 'role expectations' refers to those expectations that Alter ascribes and expects Ego to enact. This mismatch between Ego's conception and Alter's expectations creates a sense of regional antipathy or non-acceptance within Ego's role conceptualisations. The effect of failing to locate and interact with others is affected both by significant others' and audience's projections of counterroles in disagreement with Ego's role conception. In this situation Ego's policy entrepreneurs start to design narratives and strategies that seek to project one's regional sense of belonging elsewhere.

A cognitive mismatch between these states' aspirations of themselves and others' expectations regarding them leads such states to adopt strategies to adaptively manage their misplacement.

*The interplay of the layered model of identities and roles*

The layered model of identity introduced above helps us to segment and observe how the location of roles and the role behaviour associated to misplacement unfold. In these layers both self and other interact to locate a role and counterrole interaction that makes the traceability of the phenomenon of misplacement possible. Since identity lacks motivational disposition and roles are the external faces of identity for an actor, then what it happens in Hagstrom and Gustafsson's (2015) three layered model of identity is location and performance of a state's different roles. Roles are therefore the primary manifestations of a state's identity. For instance, the deepest layer of identity contains elements that constitute the most stable roles of a state as a corporate actor. It is expected that in this layer states experiencing misplacement will hold roles such as sovereign state, and others that have been part of the constitutive fabric of a state as international actor. It is the middle layer where self and others interact more recurrently about the practice and reproduction of roles and their associated narratives of misplacement. The most superficial layer involves role entrepreneurs attempting to initiate short-term changes in roles through reimagining a state's cognitive region relative to the geographic region it inhabits. If change initiated in the most superficial layer takes root, then it is likely that such misplaced roles will become a relatively stable part of the state's identity.

**Outline of the special issue**

This conceptual note has introduced a new idea of a 'misplaced state'. Though this phenomenon is the driving force behind a number of political and security challenges facing the world today, there is a limited understanding of what causes a state to feel misplaced and what strategies it adopts to try to associate with a region other than its own geographical vicinity. Given the dearth of literature on the subject, this piece is only intended to act as a primer and not as the final word on this subject. It will hopefully spark a discussion on this interesting but understudied topic which will lead to

further consolidation of the subject. Future research can focus on studying the causes and consequences of misplacement in greater detail and in their own rights.

Where this conceptual note was dedicated to developing the concept of misplaced states, the rest of the special issue will apply these ideas to six cases that include Israel, Pakistan, South Africa, Chile, Japan and Brazil. These cases are selected for two primary reasons. First, they represent a variety of geographical regions across the world as they are situated in the Middle East, South Asia, Africa, (South) Latin America and East Asia. Examining these cases provides us a contingent but refined concept of a misplaced state that will be applicable to most regions of the world. More specifically, six geographically diverse (and distinct) case studies can illustrate if there is a cross-culturally applicable concept of 'misplacedness.' Each case has different historical contexts and different regionally oriented social values. Furthermore, the comparative cases help us clarify what we mean by the terms well-placed and misplaced states and how they affect these countries' foreign policy behaviours. Second, five out of six countries fit our working definition of 'misplacedness.' They have unique cultural and historical experiences in terms of state-building, nation-building, wars, social diversity, and the international environment. Although the list of the countries is not exhaustive, examining these six countries is valid for heuristic purposes.

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